Mansfield Hits Nixon On Energy Inaction

3/22/74

By Spencer Rich
Washington Post Staff Writer

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (-Mont.) joined the Democratic counterattack on President Nixon over energy policy yesterday, strongly disputing the President's contention that Congress has dragged its feet on energy legislation.

Lashing out at the President in a Senate floor speech, Mansfield said Congress has already taken substantial action on 12 of the 17 White House energy proposals, is starting work on three others, and has been held upon another only by a dispute within the Nixon administration itself.

"The initiative, insofar as energy legislation is concerned, has been in the Senate, and was there long before the President sent up his first proposal," Mansfield said.

House Speaker Carl Albert (D-Okla.) and Majority Leader Thoma P. O'Neill (D-Mass.) and Senate Majority Whip Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) responded angrily on Wednesday to the President's accusations.

Mansfield gave a detailed listing of the status of each of the 17 pieces of legislation on which the President at his Tuesday press conference in Houston accused them of delay:

• Mansfield said the President had asked for curbs on oil firm windfall profits and Congress promptly put one into the energy emergency bill last year, only to have the White House and oil industry kill it by filibuster because it was too tough. Then Congress wrote a domestic oil price rollback provision as a substitute, but the President found that too tough also and vetoed the bill.

• The President proposed unemployment insurance aid to those losing jobs because of the energy crisis, but when Congress passed the provision as part of the energy emergency bill, the President called it too broad and gave that as another reason for vetoing the energy bill.

• Authority for imposition of mandatory conservation plans, also in the energy bill, also died with the veto. Mansfield said final White House requests for this provision weren't received until this month, if anyone wanted to assess blame for foot-dragging.

• Mansfield conceded there had been no action yet on the request for deregulation of natural gas, but others said delay on this proposal wasn't a question of lassitude or inactivity, but of serious doubts that all limits should be removed from natural gas prices.

• Mandatory reporting of energy information by oil firms was also included in the bill vetoed by Mr. Nixon, Mansfield said.

• The bill allowing production of oil from the Elk Hills Naval Petroleum Reserve has passed the Senate, Mansfield said, and is to be considered in the Hosue.

• He said the strip-mining bill also has passed the Senate "and is reaching final stages in the House."

• Mansfield said the Commerce, Public Works and Interior committees are planning to start voting soon on legislation to foster development of deepwater port facilities.

• Hearings are to start soon on revision of the Mineral Leasing Act, with "a strong viewpoint in the Congress to do away with the present bonus system on leases which favor only the large companies."

The President's 10th, 11th and 12th requests—the drilling investment tax credit, foreign depletion allowance revision and foreign tax credit revision—are being voted on by the House Ways and Means Committee, which must originate tax legislation under the Constitution, Mansfield said.

He said a bill requiring labels on motor vehicles and appliances to show amounts of energy use has passed the Senate, adding that it was curious the President was listing this since "the measure has been fought and opposed by the administration from the very beginning."

Mansfield said a bill revising nuclear power licensing procedures is being considered by the Joint Atomic Energy Committee "and proper accommodation will be recommended by that committee which will accelerate the process and not ignore the environmental impact of these sitings and licensing procedures."

The bill to create a Federal Energy Administration has already passed both chambers "and is reaching final enactment in conference," Mansfield said.

The energy research bill, providing $20 billion over 10 years, has passed the Senate, Mansfield said.

Finally, he said, a bill creating a department of energy and natural resources is being held up "by a total disagreement between Mr. (William E.) Simon and (budget director) Roy Ash" over where to locate a proposed energy research and development administration to carry out a long-range research program.